

Executive Summary

North Carolina's proposed Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST) extends nearly 900-miles, from Clingman's Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains, to Jockey's Ridge on the Outer Banks. The route winds its way through national forests, state parks, wilderness areas and wildlife refuges, as well as farming communities, small towns and urban areas. To date, more than 300 miles of the trail have been constructed and opened for public use, mainly in the state's western region.

This Conceptual Plan proposes a route and alignment for a 246-mile, combined land and water trail that will make up the eastern section of the trail, following the Neuse River from the Falls Lake Dam (north of Raleigh) to Cedar Island in Carteret County. The purpose of the Plan is to define a program of action for acquiring the land and/or public right-of-way for the trail, and to offer specific recommendations for constructing and managing this trail.

Summary of Key Recommendations

The study area was a 2000' buffer (1000' on either side) of the Neuse River, within which an alignment was to be made for the land and water trail. The navigable river already contains numerous points of access for a paddle trail, and this Plan recommends that more water access points be added in the future. The land trail is envisioned as a foot trail for hiking. Within cities and towns, the trail might be developed as a multi-use facility to serve a broader and more diverse set of users. Immediate action is needed to get the development of the MST-East on target with other state level land and water protection goals. Funding for future land acquisition and trail facility development

can come from existing State resources and can be matched with local contributions. The NC Division of Parks and Recreation and the State Trails Program will have to continue to provide leadership and serve as the champion for the early action projects.

Operating and maintaining the trail once it is opened for public use can be accomplished through a broad-based partnership. The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail has been a long standing partner of the State for completed trail segments across North Carolina. The Friends group will need to become stronger in the eastern region of the state and will need to partner with local governments and other volunteer and non-profit organizations to help oversee future management and operation of the trail system.

The implementation section of this Plan contains other specific recommendations. They include:

- Creation of a Multi-Agency Task Force comprised of representatives from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Transportation and the Commerce Department to assist local partners in acquiring, building and managing segments of the MST.
- Continued efforts to create the Middle Neuse River State Park.
- Adoption of this Plan's trail alignment by local governments along the route.
- Appropriation of Local government resources to be used as potential matching funds for existing state and federal grants.
- Technical assistance arrangements between project partners



for the long-term stewardship needs of the trail corridor.

- Commitment from private sector groups and volunteer groups that they will involve themselves in the development and management of the MST-East.

Organization of this Report

This document has been organized to provide the reader with a brief history and background of the full Mountains-to-Sea Trail and a detailed explanation of the MST-East Trail route and alignment. Descriptions of alternate routes and secondary trails are then provided along with a project implementation strategy and several appendices that can be used as reference material for building, operating and managing the trail.

All mapping work was completed using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, and represents some of the most accurate mapping that has ever been developed for the MST. Maps illustrate the route of the trail, locations of water trail access, and properties affected by the proposed land trail alignment.

More information about the Mountains-to-Sea Trail is available on two web sites. One is maintained by the State of North Carolina (<http://ils.unc.edu/parkprojects/trails/home.htm>.) The second is maintained by the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (www.ncmst.org).

It is the hope and intent of the State Trails Program that this report will serve as a catalyst for the future development of North Carolina's Mountains-to-Sea Trail. When completed, this trail will become one of the primary east-west spines of a statewide trail

network. One day in the not-so-distant future, North Carolinians will be able to walk, bike and/or paddle from one end of the state to the other on a publicly accessible and dedicated system of interconnected trails. Adhering to the recommendations of this Plan puts our state one step closer to this goal.

